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# MULTIPLE NEEDS

Time for  
political  
leadership



The Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) coalition is made up of the national charities Clinks, Homeless Link and Mind. We work closely with Collective Voice, representing the substance misuse sector. Together we represent over 1,300 frontline organisations working in the criminal justice, drug and alcohol treatment, homelessness and mental health sectors.

Working together, we support local areas across England to develop an effective, coordinated approach to multiple needs that can increase wellbeing, reduce costs to public services and improve people's lives.

[www.meam.org.uk](http://www.meam.org.uk)

“Talk is cheap. We feel neglected, shoved to the bottom, that no one’s interested. For years we’ve heard things are going to change, but they don’t.

“It’s not about your past but about who you aspire to be. We should not be labelled by our past experiences. There is good and bad in everyone.”

— EXPERT BY EXPERIENCE

# GOVERNMENT MUST ACT ON MULTIPLE NEEDS

The government has stated its determination to tackle an escalating set of crises: homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill health and persistently high re-offending rates. Despite some progress, there is currently a fundamental flaw in the way we deal with these problems: we treat them as separate when they are connected. If this doesn't change, things will only get worse – with appalling human and financial consequences.

Right now, in England, an estimated 58,000 people are living with multiple needs. These individuals face a series of simultaneous challenges – they battle drug or alcohol addiction, experience mental health problems, sleep rough and are in frequent contact with the criminal justice system. Each issue compounds another, sending people's lives on a downward spiral towards rock bottom.

Our public services either do not recognise or struggle to respond to this reality, and therefore fail to meet people's needs. Services are designed and funded as if people fit into neat boxes or go through problems in a tidy one-by-one sequence – each engaging with a single aspect of what are complex and interrelated problems.

A lack of coordination between services means that:

- people are turned away from services because their needs are judged either too mild to meet a threshold, or too severe to be manageable

- organisations don't communicate with each other to ensure that people's full range of needs are met
- local areas fail to manage crucial transitions, for example from childhood to adulthood, or as people leave institutions such as the care system or prison.

So people's situations get worse, and when support finally arrives it has to be more intense and prolonged, and frequently from emergency rather than planned services. The pressure on those services and the cost to the taxpayer escalates. The cumulative cost of multiple needs across England is staggering, estimated at between £1.1bn and £2.1bn per year.<sup>1</sup>

Things cannot go on like this. In this briefing, the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) coalition sets out how the government can bring about the nationwide change we need.

## THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA, POVERTY AND DISCRIMINATION

The problems people face in their lives today are only part of the story. Everyone with multiple needs is an individual facing a unique set of challenges, which often reflect what life has thrown at them – from childhood trauma to racial discrimination. Our poorly coordinated system of support often makes matters worse.



85% of people with the most complex needs experienced some form of **trauma in childhood**.<sup>2</sup> For women in particular, this frequently continues into adulthood, when they experience domestic abuse and violence. Public services are often ill-equipped to respond to the lasting impact of trauma.<sup>3</sup>



**Poverty** is closely associated with multiple needs. Recent research has shown that poverty in childhood appears to be the single biggest factor affecting people's subsequent risk of homelessness.<sup>4</sup>



**Black, Asian and minority ethnic people** are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Approximately 25% of people in prison come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, despite only forming 14% of the overall population.<sup>5</sup>



# WHY NOW? THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A COORDINATED RESPONSE

Across the country, some local areas are adopting a bold and effective new approach – coordinating their services to help some of society’s most vulnerable people. Now the government must seize the chance to turn this progress into a truly nationwide response.

At its best, support for people with multiple needs treats them as they actually are – as individuals going through their own particular set of interconnected problems. That’s why our public services must coordinate their efforts, providing the comprehensive and holistic support people actually need.

A well-coordinated response from our public services:

- **prevents** people from reaching the point where they face multiple problems
- **responds** effectively to their needs when they do.

This is the kind of joined-up support we are seeing in the 27 local areas MEAM works with across England, including the 12 Fulfilling Lives partnerships supported by the Big Lottery Fund. In these areas, the voluntary sector, local authorities and statutory services are working together, drawing on their shared experience and voluntary organisations’ close connections to their communities. They are changing the way that services work and transforming people’s lives.

The government has a golden opportunity to help make this happen in every local area, so that well-coordinated support for people with multiple needs becomes the norm nationwide. In doing so, the government will move us closer to being a country where people experiencing multiple needs can reach their potential and contribute to their communities. Later in this document, we set out the steps the government needs to take.

## THE COST OF NOT ACTING

The **human** cost of the current systemic failure is devastating.



Of people experiencing the most severe multiple needs, 90% are out of work, and only 16% report good or very good quality of life, compared to 70% of the general population.<sup>6</sup>



Of all adults leaving prison, 44% are reconvicted within one year of release.<sup>7</sup>



Between 2010 and 2016, in London alone, an average of one person every fortnight died while or after sleeping rough.<sup>9</sup>



Four in ten people who sleep rough need mental health support that often isn't available.<sup>8</sup>



The **economic** impact is staggering too: the cumulative cost of multiple needs across England is estimated at £1.1bn–2.1bn per year.

# A COORDINATED RESPONSE: WE KNOW IT WORKS

MEAM is helping 27 areas across England coordinate support for people with multiple needs – with impressive results. Here is just one example.

**In Blackburn**, around 500 people living in shared housing were facing multiple problems – particularly mental ill health and substance misuse. Many were bouncing back and forth between prison and very poor accommodation, and not getting the help they needed to break the cycle.

So the local authority and the Families Health and Wellbeing Consortium, which represents the voluntary sector, brought together a range of partners to implement the MEAM Approach. Karen, who works in the public health team at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, describes the partnership's formation. "The steering group was formed, attended by numerous partners including the Police and Crime Commissioner, the local hospital trust, adult social care, public health," she explains. "There's a wealth of experience and knowledge out there to pull together."

The partnership introduced a new way of working. A dedicated coordinator would spend time with people to understand their needs and coordinate a package of support based on their

aspirations, advising them where help might be available. But, as coordinator Naomi says, "It's not about me saying what I think they should do. It's about them taking control and [deciding] what they want to focus on."

In Blackburn, the system is starting to change – services that typically concentrate on one issue are becoming flexible enough to see the bigger picture.

"We have changed the way we commission substance misuse services, so they're thinking beyond just drug and alcohol problems to the wider issues people are experiencing," says Karen. "We've also worked together to improve housing strategy and standards, using the evidence we have collectively."

The approach is helping reduce demand on public services. People who had been in and out of A&E are being admitted much less frequently thanks to the coordinated support they're now receiving.





Blackburn is far from a lone story of success. Other local areas using the MEAM Approach are making a significant and measurable difference to people's lives and wellbeing, and cutting costs:

- Areas that used the MEAM Approach and carried out an evaluation found that client wellbeing increased, with outcomes on the widely-used New Directions Team scale<sup>10</sup> improving by 44% over two years.
- Areas with a coordinated approach to multiple needs recorded an average reduction in costs to wider services of 23% in the same time period.

# WHAT WE'RE ASKING FROM GOVERNMENT

While local areas are largely responsible for providing services for people with multiple needs, central government also has a critical role to play in creating the nationwide approach we need.

We're asking the government to **commit** to tackling the problem of multiple needs – showing leadership through a process of **cross-governmental collaboration**.

It must **challenge** local areas to take the necessary action, and provide them with **flexible investment** so they can find their own solutions.

In implementing the four steps over the page, it is vital that the government listens to people who've experienced multiple needs, and bases its understanding on what it hears.

“We still deserve a chance in society: hear what we say and do not be judgemental. Show an understanding.”

— EXPERT BY EXPERIENCE



# THE GOVERNMENT'S FOUR STEPS TO SUCCESS

## COMMIT

Show leadership as a government in tackling both the causes and consequences of multiple needs.

- Publicly commit to support people who are at risk of developing multiple needs and respond effectively to those who are experiencing them.
- Challenge departmental thinking, ensuring strategies on homelessness, substance misuse, mental health and criminal justice reflect the way these issues combine and reinforce each other.

## COLLABORATE

Take a collaborative approach across government so that every department is working together to address multiple needs, modelling the approach that local areas have shown can work.

- Consult with local areas, the voluntary sector and people with lived experience to develop the shared outcomes we need to see.
- Come to an agreement at the heart of government on where accountability for these outcomes lies.

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## CHALLENGE

Set a clear expectation that every local area must take effective action to support people with multiple needs.

- Ensure that every area adopts an approach that brings together different agencies to prevent and respond to multiple needs.
- Allow commissioners, services and people with lived experience to design the best solutions to the problem, and ways of measuring success.

## INVEST

Make sure flexible funding is available that encourages services to work together and allows them to respond to local needs.

- Provide secure, long-term funding to address multiple needs rather than tying it to narrow outcomes that prevent local areas from developing a joined-up response.
- Protect funding to key services that prevent people's needs from escalating, and ensure that a sustainable funding base is available for specialist voluntary organisations that meet specific needs.

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These four steps can help us tackle some of the biggest problems our society faces. Let's work together to make them happen, and give people the support they need to turn their lives around. The stories of Ash and Anne show what this kind of support makes possible.

# A COORDINATED RESPONSE: IT CHANGES LIVES

The experiences of people facing multiple needs – and the committed professionals and volunteers who support them – show that a coordinated response can change people's lives.

## ASH: “I WOULD BE DEAD WITHOUT THEM”

“I’ve been in out of homelessness, hostels, sofa surfing, since I was 15. I’m 28 now. I’ve battled drug addictions, alcoholism, you name it. Sleeping in bins, bus stops. Terrible.”

This was Ash’s life. He was unemployed for long spells, turned to drugs and alcohol, and was in and out of hospital. When he most needed support, he had no one to turn to.

“You’re on your own. Nobody wants to listen to you.”

Then he came into contact with Louise, a coordinator working for Blackburn with Darwen’s MEAM Approach partnership.

The local area’s coordinated and flexible approach meant Louise could give Ash the direct one-to-one support he so needed. Several times a week, she’d meet with him to talk and listen, and connect him with a range of services.

It’s helped Ash get a job and a flat of his own. He’s stopped using drugs and alcohol, and now has a girlfriend.

“Since I was referred to the Blackburn partnership, I can talk to Louise about anything,” he says. “They’ve been brilliant. I would be dead without them. I’ve been in such a dark place. They changed everything, lifted my spirits, about how I feel about people, how I feel about myself. They’ve got me coming off drugs, coming off alcohol, happy with my flat. Everything.”



## ANNE: “SOCIETY HAD THROWN ME AWAY”

Marie remembers the day she first met Anne. It was in the healthcare wing of a local prison. “The moment I walked in I knew she was in the wrong place. We talked about how we could help her, but mostly about what she wanted me to do to help.”

Anne had mental health problems and had been sleeping rough.

“I found my life spiralling out of control,” says Anne. “The things that mattered to me had become finding enough food to eat and a roof over my head. I felt as though society had thrown me away. Whenever I went anywhere, people would glaze over and go ‘oh no, not her’.”

Then she was referred to Marie from the Counting Every Adult Team in Cambridgeshire, which uses the MEAM Approach. Anne says: “When I met Marie in prison, she smiled at me, she gave me a hug, she treated me like a human being. Marie said she would walk with me every step of the way, giving me the stability I needed to rebuild my life. Marie was a place of hope for me. I felt as if somebody was actually listening to my voice for the first time in a long time.”



The flexibility of her role means Marie is able to develop relationships with the agencies that can deliver a coordinated response for people with multiple needs. She sums up the change this kind of approach makes possible: “We’ve shown that we can work with people that otherwise would be thrown away by society. And we really are making a difference to people’s lives.”

We know a coordinated approach works, but it is happening in too few areas and without proper backing from central government. It is time for the government to replicate it on a national scale.

# NEXT STEPS

We need an urgent debate among policymakers and politicians on multiple needs – one that leads to action. We will be discussing our proposals with all parts of government and across all political parties.

## WE INVITE YOU TO:

- **WORK WITH US** and our partners to help implement the four steps we have set out in this document
- **VISIT LOCAL AREAS** that are taking a new approach to multiple needs, and find out what they need to support their vital work
- **LISTEN TO PEOPLE** with lived experience of multiple needs and the frontline practitioners who support them, and learn from their knowledge.

It is time for the government to transform this country's response to the problem of multiple needs: both by tackling the issues people experience today, and by seeking to prevent them from developing in the first place.

It won't be easy: it will take political will and persistence. But by working together, we can ensure that people reach their full potential and contribute to their communities.

The coming year will see the government set out plans to end rough sleeping, take measures to improve our prison and probation services, introduce a new Mental Health Bill and deliver its drug strategy. Each of these developments, and many more to come, will directly impact people with multiple needs.

For that reason, it's vital that all of these policy areas are joined up, and informed by people's experiences. This should include the voices of those who face distinct challenges and are so often ignored, particularly women and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.



## TAKE ACTION

There are clear models of what well-coordinated support can look like in MEAM Approach areas, Fulfilling Lives partnerships, and Housing First projects. The evidence from these initiatives shows that addressing multiple needs can save money and change lives.



## THE MEAM APPROACH

The MEAM Approach helps local areas design and deliver better coordinated services for people with multiple needs. It's currently being used by partnerships of statutory and voluntary agencies in 15 local areas across England.

To date, areas using the MEAM Approach have secured £1.3m of local funding to support their work. Those that have conducted an evaluation report an average 23% reduction in wider service use costs and a 44% improvement in wellbeing.

Find out more: [meam.org.uk/the-meam-approach/](https://meam.org.uk/the-meam-approach/)



## FULFILLING LIVES

The Big Lottery Fund's Fulfilling Lives programme funds 12 voluntary-sector-led partnerships across England, which are working together to improve services for people with multiple needs.

With an investment of £112m over eight years, these areas aim to change not only people's lives, but also the wider system of support. Experts by experience are at the centre of the programme, helping to design, deliver and evaluate the work of the partnerships.

Find out more: [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog\\_complex\\_needs](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_complex_needs)



## HOUSING FIRST

Housing First is an internationally evidence-based approach, which enables individuals with multiple needs to move away from homelessness and begin their recovery.

Unlike other supported housing models, individuals do not need to prove they are ready for independent housing. Through Housing First projects they receive access to a tenancy; intensive, flexible and person-centred support to help them manage it; and referrals to other services when they need them. The support provided is holistic and underpinned by a recognised set of principles.

Homeless Link's Housing First England project is creating and supporting a national network of Housing First services.

Find out more: [hfe.homeless.org.uk](http://hfe.homeless.org.uk)

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### Notes

- 1 MEAM (2016), *Individuals with multiple needs: the case for a national focus*, p. 7
- 2 Lankelly Chase (2015), *Hard Edges*, p. 28
- 3 University of Sheffield and MEAM (2017), *Going further back: earlier action on multiple needs to prevent homelessness*
- 4 Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2017) 'Homelessness in the UK: Who is most at risk?', *Housing Studies*
- 5 Lammy (2017), *The Lammy Review*, p. 3
- 6 Lankelly Chase (2015), *Hard Edges*, pp. 35-37
- 7 Prison Reform Trust (2017), *Prison: the facts: Bromley Briefings Summer 2017*, p. 14
- 8 St Mungo's (2016), *Stop the Scandal*, p. 4
- 9 St Mungo's (2016), *Nowhere safe to stay*, p. 8
- 10 For more information on the NDT assessment, visit [meam.org.uk](http://meam.org.uk)

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